Missions, Foreign — 1919.

# The Queerest Craft Since Noah Sailed

N Y C WORLD
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## Blueprint Plans Do Not Figure in the Construction of This Wondrous "Ark of the Living God," in Which the Rev. James E. Lewis (Otherwise Kulo Lonbono, Native Prophet of Liberia) Dreams of Carrying Salvation's Gospel to Africa.

By John L. Von Blon.

HERE'S a surprise in the air for Liberia. Some rosy-goldy morning late this year, if nought goes amiss, the populace of Monrovia, capital of the negro republic on the West African Coast, will harken to a hallelujah chorus and see a mystery ship round Cape Mesurado and come swinging to anchorage on the blue tropical tide.

It will be the triumphal return, in his own floating tabernacle and with a missionary host, of Kulo Lonbono, native prophet—otherwise Rev. James E. Lewis, American by adoption. Twenty-seven years ago he went forth in quest of a faith of salvation. Having found the light he purposes to turn it full blast on his benighted brethren. He expects to be hailed as a deliverer. All Africa is to be redeemed if his dream comes true.

THIS ambitious black man's craft—and it's to be shining white—will be the oddest since Noah's navigation of the deluge. The exploit the reverend skipper essays is one of the most amazing of modern times. He set himself an extraordinary task and is actually carrying it through, unperturbed by jeers, undaunted by difficulties. He may be visionary, but his vision is of the kind that surmounts obstacles.

On Terminal Island, inner Los Angeles Harbor, he is building the unique boat. Without money, credit or visible material, and only his wife to help him, he began over a year ago. He has reared the hull frame, eighty-five feet long and thirty feet high, and now announces to the hundreds of curious watchers that it is to be a concrete vessel; that the present structure, to be sheathed with two-inch planks, is only the outer mould.

*"Some fancy American poultry is to be taken along.*

Never before has so grotesque a skeleton towered on ocean's brink.

The only tools employed are a saw, an axe, augers and hammers. The lumber utilized is scrap out of an old house, mostly 2x4's of short lengths split, patched and spliced; together with such odds and ends as the sea casts up and litters along the outer beach not far away—nondescript combings. The shell looms big above the shanties of the alien fisher folk among whom its designer squatted to prosecute his labors of love and faith, but it doesn't appear convincingly substantial. There are few cross-braces, and those weak and shaky. One side is badly "dished," too, but that doesn't bother brother the Rev. Mr. Lewis, who says it'll straighten out all right. He is pounding away steadily, with the sanction of the Board of Harbor Commissioners.

The Federal inspectors of hulls and boilers seem hesitant to view the operations seriously, and have thus far pursued a "hands-off" policy. Master constructors in the great merchant-marine yards nearby scoff and predict that the first stiff breeze will bring about the novelty of a shipwreck on dry land. But the parson maintains he'll have a grand la'nching in four or five months of a stanch and trim leviathan that will take to the water like a gull and sail the main as majestically as the Mauretania or any other liner—and do a lot more good for humanity. In her coat of glistening paint she may be a poem of the deep, albeit of the vers libre or staggered skip-stop variety.

The hull is set on three short logs or rolling ways, certainly an innovation, with a good slant toward the channel. The keel, light and of several parts, is "inlaid" with oiled canvas and a preparation of pitch which the Rev. Mr. Lewis claims will close the pores of the concrete and make it impregnable as armor plate. There are no keel blocks. All is simplicity. The preacher works solely from mental plans. He knows how he wants everything to be, and goes ahead and does it accordingly. Draughtsmen and blueprints do not enter into his scheme. He spurns the impedimenta of the ordinary shipyard. Mrs. Lewis helps hoist every timber that he cannot handle alone, and toils with him early and late. Her confidence of success challenges his.

THIS embryo sea-going chapel is called "the Ark of the Living God," and not irreverently, by the harbor people; but her sponsor-constructor christened her "the Colored Missionary Yacht" the day the first spike was driven home. There was ceremony, but no wine was spilled. He estimates that she will cost $15,000. To date about $500 actual cash has been expended. Reliance is placed mainly on the Lord to provide, and the minister insists there can be no failure. On this source he is dependent for the concrete which he expects to begin pouring ere long. He figures on thirteen-inch walls and 125 tons. There are five bags of cement in sight, donated by a neighbor.

Re-enforcement will be of iron and steel wires and cables gathered up wherever found, and some are already in place. The craft is to be driven by a 120-horse-power gasoline engine turning twin screws by virtue of a gear arrangement evolved by the brain which conceived the wonderful project, and two foresails and mainsail. Three fairly good discarded telephone poles or piles would come handy just now for conversion into masts.

Her funnel is alongside. It was salvaged from a derelict half buried in the basin mud and is thirty feet long and desperately battered, but the indefatigable zealot is hammering it into shape. It's a big stack for a gasoline engine, but he says there are cookstoves to be connected with it also. Negotiations for the power plant are under way. The engine room will be amidships. There will be a large hold, ample living quarters, and immense space forward for religious services. The draft, light, is to be five and a half feet.

The parson and his wife live most frugally in a shack almost under the prow of the Colored Missionary Yacht, and he preaches and conducts Sunday-school in their home, drawing on the Mexican and Japanese families of the settlement and the colored residents of the harbor district for a congregation and pupils. From the bow staff above them float the Stars and Stripes, the Liberian flag, and the banner of the "Church of the Living God."

KULO LONBONO, now past forty-seven, left his homeland in 1892 with the object of ultimately bettering the condition of its people, he states, and represented some of the tribes on the Midway at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Afterward he got some schooling in that city, changed his name, studied theology to a meagre extent, and has exhorted ever since, always diligently seeking a way to prepare the Liberians for a place in the sun. In Los Angeles he got the inspiration which is now taking tangible, not to say concrete, form.

He is the only minister of the "Church of the Living God," colored, the world's smallest known denomination, with but fifteen full-fledged adherents, and this organization is backing him loyally. The general leader is Bishop William Williams of Los Angeles, now in Georgia proselytizing. Bishop C. A. Smith is the California head and Edwin Perrish the presiding elder. All are bending their energies toward the completion of the pastor's endeavor, for which contributions have gone forward from colored people in New York, Boston, Washington, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago and many Southern

cities.

The doctrine of his church, according to Rev. Mr. Lewis, is based upon the Ten Commandments. It teaches that the only hell is here on earth —that our sorrows and tribulations and afflictions of whatever sort are punishment here for our transgressions, and that there will be no fire and brimstone in the hereafter. Both Saturday and Sunday are held sacred and devoted to regular services.

FIFTY to a hundred missionaries of both sexes are to be carried on the first voyage. They may be white, yellow or black, but they must have the living gospel in their hearts to pass muster. Already about twenty, all colored, are making their way by easy—and sometimes hard—stages to Southern California against the day of sailing.

The course is to be via the South Sea Islands, the Panama Canal, Santo Domingo, and in particular a group of islands under the equator this side of St. Helena with which Rev. Mr. Lewis is familiar, and whose wild inhabitants still dote on missionary served from the steaming kettle. Here he aims to promote better taste before proceeding to the dark African shores. Apropos of this plan, attention may here be called to a well-made chicken coop, already completed and occupied, near the stern of the Colored Missionary Yacht. In this some fancy American poultry is to be transported across the pond. Possibly a cure for cannibalism!

The missionaries are not to be charged a penny for their passage, the ministerial shipwright gives out, but they will be required to pay for their board. This, he calculates, will amount to about $35 each. The distance is approximately 10,000 miles and it won't be a swift voyage, so that's cheap subsistence as gauged by present H. C. L. standards. Cheaper than staying at home, where there's no missionary field.

*Side view of the hull frame of the "Colored Missionary Yacht," 85 feet long and 30 feet high, built of scrap lumber and driftwood. The preacher-builder says this frame is only the outside of a concrete mould.*

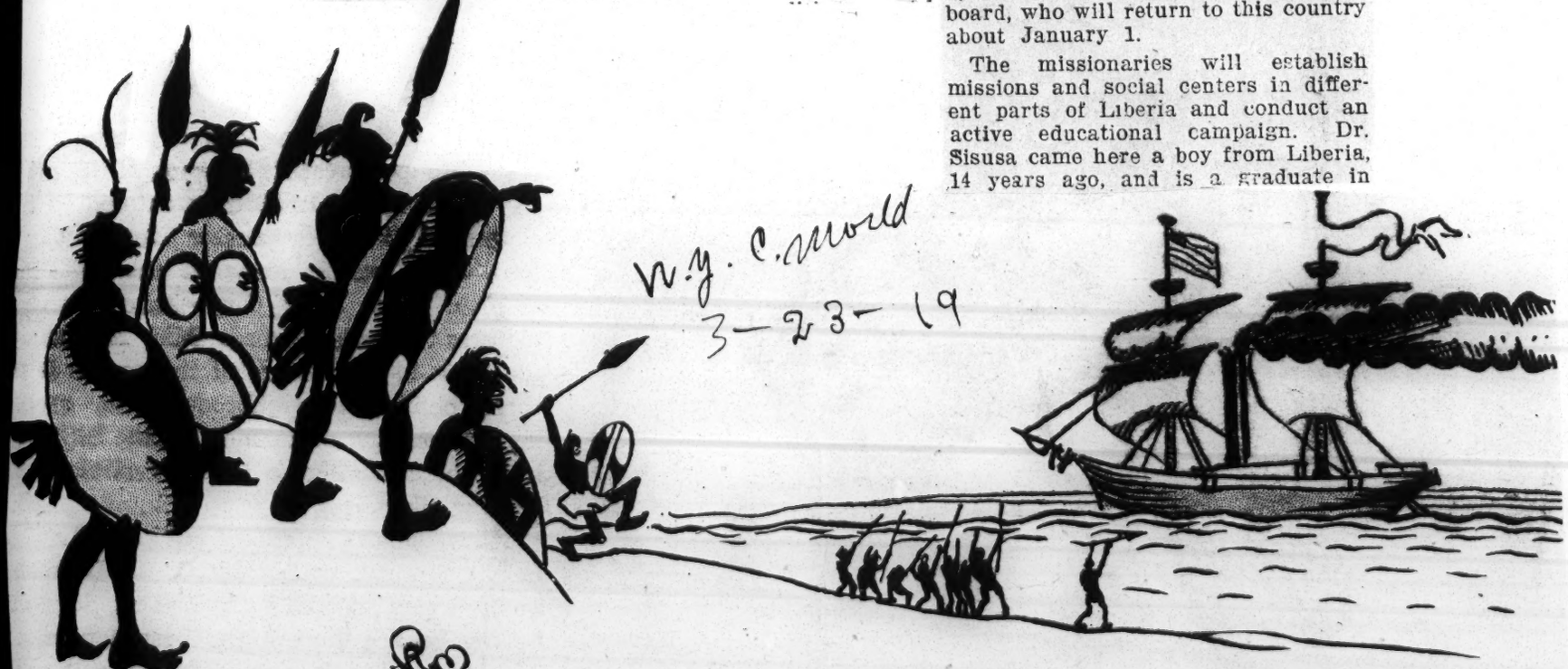
## COLORED MISSIONARIES LEAVE FOR LIBERIA

The Sun Louisville 10-24-1918

By Associated Negro Press:

PHILADELPHIA, Pa., Oct. 16.—A party of Colored missionaries from this city will sail from New York on Friday to take up their residence permanently in Liberia. They are Dr. R. M. Sisusa who is accompanied by his wife and children; Miss Priscille Bryan, Miss Della E. Harris, Rev. D. S. Nichols and Miss Ella Hooks. They are being sent to Africa by the Foreign Missionary Board of the Baptist Church and are being accompanied by Rev. L. G. Jordan, secretary of the board, who will return to this country about January 1.

The missionaries will establish missions and social centers in different parts of Liberia and conduct an active educational campaign. Dr. Sisusa came here a boy from Liberia, 14 years ago, and is a graduate in medicine. He is returning to his home country to practice medicine, where there is now only one physician among two and one half millions of Negroes. Miss Priscilla Bryan is a graduate dentist and will be the first of her profession to practice in Liberia. Miss Harris is a graduate of a social service training school and will look after the social center work.




## NEGRO MISSIONARY TO GIVE LECTURE

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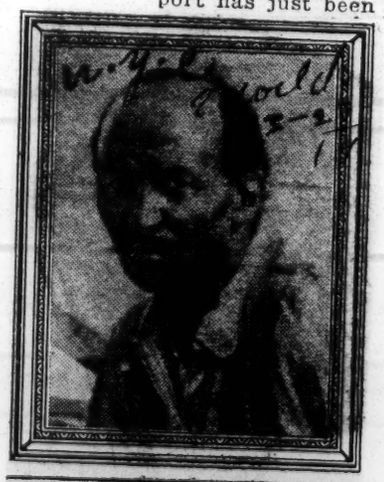
FEBRUARY 13, 1919

### Driven Home by World War Is Returning to China.

Dr. William Williams, the noted negro missionary who has ministered in China, Japan and the Fiji Islands, will lecture at the Mount Zion Baptist Church Monday evening at 8 o'clock.

Dr. Williams was missionary to China two years previous to the entrance of the United States into the world war. Hearing that his country was about to declare war on Germany, the colored preacher immediately applied for transportation to the United States, where he was among the first to register for service. He speaks three languages and has preached to the Chinese in their own tongue.

Dr. Williams leaves Columbia for Philadelphia his last stop before embarking for Cuba. From Cuba he goes to New Zealand, thence to the Fiji Islands, and on to China. His passport has just been issued him




*Rev. James E. Lewis, whose dream of a sea-going missionary chapel is approaching realization at Los Angeles, Cal.*